

Why Study Philosophy?

- What is the value in philosophy?
- Does it have any practical value?
- *Must* it serve some practical purpose in order to be worthy of study?
- If philosophy doesn't serve any such purpose, what good is it?

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

- English philosopher and logician
- One of the major philosophers of the 20th Century
- Wrote the bulk of his most important papers and books in the early part of the 20th century
- Later in life devoted much of his time and work to political activism—being an outspoken opponent of the nuclear arms build-up during the height of the Cold War.
- Won the Nobel Prize in Literature (1950)

The Value of Philosophy

- The common view of philosophy: since it's concerned with such abstract subjects, ideas, theories, "innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters which knowledge is impossible," it has no (or very little) value.
- The "practical man" (or the "instinctive man"): anyone who recognizes the practical needs of human beings, but who is "oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind" (p. 9)

The Common View

- What's wrong with it?
- Russell: it “appears to result, partly from a wrong conception of the ends of life, partly from a wrong conception of the kinds of goods which philosophy strives to achieve” (p. 9)

- Many disciplines have value primarily because they are *directly* beneficial to society and humankind in general.
- “This utility does not belong to philosophy” (p. 9)
- At most, philosophy has an *indirect* benefit to society in general via the direct effects it has on the lives of those who study it.
- But what effect *does* philosophy have on those who study it?

- Philosophy aims at *knowledge*.
- “The kind of knowledge it aims at is the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs” (p. 9)

- But the “practical man” complains:
Philosophers rarely (if ever) offer
uncontroversial or obviously correct
answers to the big questions of philosophy.
- Russell replies: “The value of philosophy
is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very
uncertainty” (p. 10)

- “Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom” (p. 10)
- Through the practice of philosophy, we can escape the narrow, instinctive and unexamined life of the so-called “practical man”
- This suggests the question: what is involved in the practice of philosophy?

The Philosopher's Toolkit

- The practice of philosophy chiefly involves providing and critically assessing *arguments*.
- *An argument is a set of propositions (called *the premises*) that purports to provide reason for believing that another proposition (called *the conclusion*) is true.

But what sorts of philosophical arguments are there?

- We may distinguish between at least two different kinds of arguments: (i) *deductive*, and (ii) *non-deductive* arguments.
- *The difference between deductive and non-deductive arguments consists in the degree of support the premises purport to lend to the conclusion.

Deductive Arguments

- A deductive argument is an argument whose premises purport to provide support for its conclusion that is so strong that, *if* all of the premises are true, it is *impossible* for the conclusion to be false.

The Virtues of a Deductive Argument

- Two questions we ask:
 - (1) Is this argument valid?
 - Does the conclusion follow from the premises?
 - An argument is *deductively valid* (or, simply, valid) just in case it is such that, necessarily, *if* all of the premises are true, then the conclusion is true.
 - Validity is a property of the logical form of arguments. The logical form of an argument is constituted by the inference underpinning the relation between the premises and conclusion.

- An argument can be valid and yet have some (or even all) false premises *and* a false conclusion.
 - Some valid arguments with false premises:
 - P1. If Bernie Madoff is poor, then he is a model citizen.
 - P2. Bernie Madoff is poor.
 - C. Thus, Bernie Madoff is a model citizen.

- P1. If Socrates was handsome, then he was a bad philosopher.
- P2. Socrates was handsome.
- C. Therefore, he was a bad philosopher.

Modus Ponens:

P1. If P, then Q.

P2. P.

C. Therefore, Q.

- Another example:
 - P1. If Tony Soprano is a mobster, then he is a criminal.
 - P2. Tony Soprano is not a criminal.
 - C. So, he's not a mobster.

Modus Tollens:

P1. If P, then Q.

P2. Not-Q.

C. So, Not-P.

- P1. Either Britney Spears is the greatest pop vocalist of all time or Phish is an excellent band.
- P2. Phish is *not* an excellent band.
- C. Thus, Britney Spears is the greatest pop vocalist of all time.

Disjunctive Syllogism:

P1. P or Q.

P2. Not-Q.

C. Thus, P.

- P1. If God exists, then the Jonas Brothers will be unable to publicly release their next album.
- P2. If the Jonas Brothers are unable to publicly release their next album, then Christopher Hitchens will be the happiest person on Earth.
- C. Thus, if God exists, then Christopher Hitchens will be the happiest person on Earth.

Hypothetical Syllogism:

P1. If P, then Q.

P2. If Q, then R.

C. Thus, if P, then R.

The Chief Virtue of a Deductive Argument

- Is the argument *sound*?

An argument is sound just in case (i) it is valid and (ii) it has all true premises.

Soundness = (validity + all true premises)

Thus, a sound argument *cannot* have any false premises or a false conclusion.

Non-Deductive Arguments

- A non-deductive argument is one that does *not* purport to provide premises that, if true, *guarantee* the truth of the conclusion.
- Instead, a non-deductive argument purports to provide premises that, if true, *probabilify* the conclusion (i.e., make the truth of the conclusion probable).
- A non-deductive argument may be *strong* or *weak*, depending on the extent to which it succeeds in this.

- Non-deductive arguments come in two stripes: (i) *inductive* and (ii) *abductive*
- Examples of *inductive* arguments:
 - P1. All of the observed crows have been black.
 - C. Thus, the next observed crow will be black

- P1. 80% of students at UCSB in the sample are from California.
- C. Thus, 80% of students at UCSB are from California.
- Examples of *abductive* arguments:
 - Argument by Analogy:
 - P1. An eyeball is like a machine in that it has a very specific function.
 - P2. Machines are the products of intelligent design.
 - C. Therefore, an eyeball is the product of intelligent design.